

MAR 27 1964

# REVIEW and OUTLOOK

## When Myths Become Traps

Debunking is an old if not always honored tradition in this country, and Senator Fulbright has now laid into a goodly number of myths presently festooning America's foreign policy. Even so, it may be that some of the myths he omitted are as important as those he attacked.

Much of what the chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee said in a Senate speech this week, it seems to us, is eminently sound. Thus one of his central points is that, contrary to some stereotyped thinking, issues often boil down to not how much the U.S. can do in the world but how little. To the Senator this simple truth has several applications.

It means the U.S. can't dictate trade policy to its allies. Though Washington is not above a wheat deal with the Soviets, it has tried to dissuade the Europeans from extending long-term credits to the East Bloc. But they are plainly going to do as much trading as they can no matter what exhortations they hear from this side of the Atlantic.

More specifically it means the attempt to get agreement on a boycott against Cuba is a demonstrated failure. The Government's ineffectual retaliatory steps against a couple of nations trading with the Castro regime only make the U.S. look silly—our word, not the Senator's. While he does not recommend that the U.S. itself get chummy with Castro, he thinks we should give up as a bad job such importuning of other nations.

Conversely, the clinging to clichés—often moralistic ones—can keep us from using what influence we are able to exert; for one thing, it can inhibit our exploitation of the divisions in the Communist world. That world today is in evident disarray, which is another way of saying that there are now several varieties of communism; yet the bloc is often still regarded as a monolith.

"The myth," observed Mr. Fulbright, "is that every Communist state is an unmitigated evil and a relentless enemy of the free world; the reality is that some Communist regimes pose a threat to the free world while others pose little or none, and that if we will recognize these distinctions, we ourselves will be able to influence events in the Communist bloc in a way favor-

able to the security of the free world."

One nation whose threat is clear is Red China, and the Senator sees no advantage at all in recognizing it or agreeing to its admission to the UN in present circumstances. He suggests, though, that those circumstances are not necessarily immutable. Peking might one day abandon its hope of conquering Formosa, or it might for reasons of its own alter its profound hostility to the U.S.

If, however, we let our own distaste for that regime become a ritual and mystical incantation of opposition, instead of a pragmatic matter of national interest, we may not be able to make a useful response to any changes that might occur in the future.

Mr. Fulbright might have explored a few more myths. A notable one was propounded by President Johnson a few days ago; twice in the same speech he said general war is impossible. Unlikely, perhaps, certainly devoutly to be avoided; but to call general war flatly impossible is to resort to mythology, and a risky one at that if it is interpreted as meaning we no longer have much to fear from our foes.

For some of the myths the Senator was tackling persist precisely because they represent a reaction to earlier policies of appeasement. In World War II days the nation was repeatedly told that the Soviet Communists were really democrats at heart and good friends who would help us build a peaceful new world. It didn't take long for that myth to get brutally debunked, and ever since most Americans have been unswerving in their distrust and detestation of any and all Communists.

By now it is probably time to re-examine the realities of the Communist world and see how, if at all, we can profit by the changes. Except by military force, we do not have the power to win the cold war; we may be able to help modify it in our interests and the interests of a more stable peace.

The extremely tricky problem for policy-makers is to do that without falling for the most dangerous myth of all: That the Communist divisions and tactical retreats are conclusive proof the centers of Red power have now put away their distinctly unhealthy designs on us.